

Palearctic species, *citreola* and *flava*. The first of these comprises three subspecies and the second is so notoriously variable that no two systematists agree on the number of subspecies admissible and there is considerable disagreement on whether these constitute one species or more than one, and, if so, how many.

The remaining species is the Ethiopian *capensis*. Irwin (1960) has given reasons for regarding it as closely related to *flava*, being, in his opinion, an isolated representative of a form of wide Palearctic distribution and derived from that form. There are certainly resemblances between the two species but these are not, in my opinion, proof of so close a relationship as Irwin infers. *M. capensis* agrees with the *alba* group in having a tail of medium length; it has some slight infusion of yellow in its plumage; and it is divisible into three valid subspecies.

From the foregoing, I would suggest that the genus as a whole has evolved largely in the Palearctic; that *aguimp* and *clara* are indeed isolated representatives derived from the Palearctic *alba* and *cinerea* stock respectively; but that *capensis* must be very close to the original form from which the Palearctic wagtails have diverged, the *alba* group by suppression of yellow and intensification of black; the *flava* group by shortening the tail and increasing the amount of yellow pigment; and the *cinerea* group by lengthening the tail, and increasing the yellow pigment in some cases; and that the variation shown in this last group in respect of both these characters (*M. cinerea robusta* in tail-length and *M. clara* in pigmentation) suggest that these changes have all been fairly recent.

References:—

- Irwin, M.P.S. (1960), 'Aspects of Relationship between Palearctic and Ethiopian Wagtails', *Bull. B.O.C.*, 80: 61-4.  
 Vaurie, C. (1959), 'The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna', i. London.  
 Voous, K. H. (1959), 'The Relationships of the European and Ethiopian Avifaunas', *Proc. P.A.O.C., The Ostrich*, Suppl. 3: 34-9.

## A variant plumage of the

### Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava thunbergi* Billberg

by C. J. O. HARRISON

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On the 4th August 1960 while studying birds along the Torne River in Northern Sweden, near Haparanda, I observed a variant individual among the local Grey-headed Wagtails *Motacilla flava thunbergi* Billberg. These wagtails were present in scattered family parties along the meadows beside the river. The typical juveniles appeared dark brown on head, mantle, back, and wing-covert, with pale buff on the underside and yellow on the under tail-coverts. The eye-stripe and throat appeared almost white, and the dark stripe on either side of the throat, joining across the breast, almost black.

The variant individual had plumage in which the brown colour was replaced by a clear grey, darker than that of the juvenile White Wagtails *Motacilla alba alba* L. which were also present in that locality. The underside, throat and eye-stripe appeared white, but the under tail-coverts retained their yellow colour.

From its behaviour and call-notes I had no doubt that it was one of a family of Grey-headed Wagtails that were with it.

Had it not been for the locality in which it was seen it would have been impossible to separate it from similar variants which have been described for the Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima* (Blyth). Smith (1950) has a coloured illustration of a pair of such birds seen in Norfolk in 1941. The cock has some degree of yellow colour on the underside and head, but the hen shows none.

I saw a similar hen at Mitcham in Surrey on 24th May 1947, and Milne (1959) records one at Beddington in Surrey in 1957.

There has been a tendency to associate such birds with those which show abnormal head colouration. But the latter varies within the genus, resulting in visible specific differences: Milne (op. cit.) suggests that the abnormal head colouration is the result of intraspecific breeding.

The variant plumage already described appears to be independent of head colouration, and seems to be the result of the absence of a brown pigment in the plumage as a whole.

In many psittacine birds the mainly green colour of the feathers is the result of the combination of a yellow pigment and a blue structural colour in each feather. These are inherited through different genes and it is possible to breed birds which possess one and not the other, being either yellow or blue.

It seems possible that something similar may occur in these wagtails, the olive-brown of the back being a combination of brown and blue-grey, each controlled by a different gene. The yellow colour appears to be either linked with the blue-grey, or independent of either.

References:—

Smith, Stuart. *The Yellow Wagtail*. London 1950.

Milne, B. S. Variation in a population of Yellow Wagtails. *Brit. Birds* 52 (1959): 281–295.

## **The Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus tropicalis* Peters a host of the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* Stephens in Southern Rhodesia**

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

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There appears to be no previous published record of the Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* victimizing the Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyanus*. In a communication received from Mr. H. M. Miles, who is the Organising Secretary in Southern Rhodesia of the South African Ornithological Society Nest Record Scheme, he tells me that Mr. C. K. Cooke has recently twice found this Cuckoo victimizing the Kurrichane Thrush at Khami, near Bulawayo, where he has examined dozens of this thrush's nests.

On 14th December, 1958 one of these cuckoos was found alone in a *Turdus libonyanus* nest near his house, which is surrounded by forest.

Next year, on 20th December 1959, he found another Kurrichane Thrush's nest in a Jacaranda tree in his garden. Of the two eggs in the nest one was a normal egg for this thrush, but the other one was a very pale green with a few spots. These spots were all alike rusty brown, some very pale and very small; the eggs were not measured.